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NOTES FROM THE PARENTS' ASSOCIATION

MRS. ELLA ADAMS MOORE

Secretary

The February meeting of the Parents' Association was held on Thursday, February 15, at 8 P. M., in the School of Education.

Mr. G. H. Mead spoke on "Social Ideals of the School." He said: The child forms his own personality through social experience. His ego is the center of the organization of a social nature. It follows that his personality, his character, can be developed only through an environment which is socially organized. The child is not an individual first, and a social being afterward. He becomes an individual through his social experiences. The social organization of the school is bound, therefore, to reflect itself in the child's inner growth. If that organization is that of a crowd, the effect of his social environment upon the child will be that which a crowd has always proved itself to have, that of reducing the intellectual character of conduct, and lowering the standards of action. Even the virtues of the disciplined crowd are those of external order, obedience, routine, conformity, and the sort of devotion that is unthinking.

It is essential, then, that the school should be organized upon a higher plane than that of merely the crowd—that of a mass of children who are brought into merely external relations with each other. It is a precondition of any proper social ideals in the school that the groups should be small enough to allow the organization of the family type, not that of the factory or the army. In no case should the numbers of the groups go above sixteen. In the second place, it is essential that the work should be of a co-operative sort, that natural assistance may be rendered by the children one to another, that the children may be organized by what they do, not by what they must not do, and that the intellectual content of what they learn may pass over into their

social conduct. It follows also that the work must be of a constructive character for the same reasons. Finally the social occasions, such as those of the dancing classes, the debating and other clubs, whose activities spring naturally from the life of the school, should be multiplied, especially in the high school.

Mr. Mead was followed by Miss Emily J. Rice, of the Department of History, College of Education. Miss Rice spoke on "The Theory of Social Occupations." She said: I have asked many classes of student teachers, who come to us from all parts of the country, what they consider the greatest change in the schools within the last fifteen years. They invariably say that it is the introduction of active work into the curriculum, such work as cooking and gardening, sewing and weaving, wood-work and clay-modeling. It is being recognized by teachers everywhere, whether it is by the general public or not, that this active work is coming into the schools so rapidly as to form the most important educational movement of our times.

I believe that there are two leading causes for this change—one which may be called psychological, and the other sociological. The psychologists have taught us that the activities of children are largely motor in kind. Surely parents and teachers were not unacquainted with the fact that children are active before the psychologists told them so, but it took this scientific term to give them a true estimation of the value of activity. Activity has been considered in the past a thing to repress, at least in school. We have thought that teacher the best who could repress it the most thoroughly. The term "motor" influences the teachers in a wonderful way, because it frees them from the bondage of tradition. Perhaps it would be well to popularize it among the parents.

Some twenty-five or thirty years ago there was a wave of object-lesson teaching, as we called it, all over this country. The children were allowed to observe objects and describe them. This was a great reform for those times. The children might even touch the objects, but they must not do anything with them—use them in any constructive way. This object-teaching was the recognition of the fact that we have a sensory nervous system,

and that our senses aid us in acquiring knowledge. It has taken all these years to teach us that we have a motor nervous system also, and that these are very closely connected. Thought and action belong together, and the child learns best when he has an opportunity of carrying his thought out in action.

At the same time that the psychologists were emphasizing the value of activity, the sociologists came to us with another lesson. Careful consideration of the conditions of modern life shows that there is very little opportunity for motor training in the average home of today. A few years ago the majority of people lived in the country and on the farms. The children came in contact with the raw materials of industry and had an opportunity to assist in their manufacture. The farm was a great manual-training school. Concentration in cities has taken this education away from the children. Specialization of industry and division of labor have also removed the industries from the homes. We no longer spin and weave, knit and sew. Such cooking and house-keeping as are left to the family are so complicated that the children cannot assist in them. If the value of such training is not to be entirely lost, the schools must take up the work abandoned by the homes, and it is interesting to see that one by one these industries have reappeared in the schools.

The social occupations change the whole character of the schools. The children come to have an active attitude toward learning instead of a passive one. This is true even of the older subjects of the curriculum, the history and geography, the science and mathematics. In their cooking and gardening, sewing and weaving, many problems arise in the children's minds in regard to the nature of the materials and the use which man has made of them, and these problems can be solved best in the lessons on nature-study and history. The children go to books to find answers to their own questions instead of learning lessons set by the teacher. The weakness of the old system lies in the fact that the teacher imposed the tasks upon the children, and the children worked without any impulse from within. With the social occupations, they gain knowledge which is of immediate interest to them, and which they can use in some direct way.

I have often thought that we have a marvelous faculty for introducing the best things into the schools in such a way as to get the least good from them. In many schools the occupations are put into the seventh and eighth grades only, the two highest grades in the elementary schools. The children's habits of study are largely formed before this time. They have not gained the physical strength nor the mental energy which come with the occupations, and these cannot be cultivated in two short years. Most of that time must be spent in the vain effort to counteract the tendencies already gained. The occupations are also introduced one hour, or an hour and a half, a week only. The children are engaged in active work one short period in the entire week, and all the rest of the time their work is of a passive character. We cannot expect by this means to secure those habits of self-control, patience, and endurance, and the feeling of the value of doing useful things, which should be the result of the industries. The occupations are taught by special teachers who know little of the work of the regular teachers, and the regular teachers are unacquainted with the work of the special teachers. Often they teach in separate buildings and cannot even consult with one another conveniently. Under such circumstances it is impossible that the spirit of the social occupations should enter into the methods of teaching of the other subjects.

Where the spirit of the social occupations permeates the whole school, even the discipline is transformed. The order becomes that of a group of people working together toward a common end. The test of success is no longer the quantity of knowledge acquired by each child in contrast or competition with the others, but what each contributes to the work of all. Many people believe that, if a textbook on morals were introduced into the schools, the children's conduct would be greatly influenced thereby. But the thoughtful teacher places very little reliance upon any such extraneous method. If we wish to have the children do right, we must give them conditions for right action. Habits are formed by doing, not by learning what others have done or what ought to be done. The school which makes the social occupations its center has an opportunity not only to give

the children ideals of conduct, but also to help them to act in accordance with their ideals. I do not say that it does this. It may not live up to its possibilities, but it certainly has this unusual opportunity.

A discussion of these two papers followed.